

## drowning in a sea of stars

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# drowning in a sea of stars

by [notanannoyingfangirl](#)

## Summary

Commander Alina Starkov's ship goes down somewhere over Alchera, the hull ripped apart and the crew exposed to the cold, empty vacuum of space. There are fifty one people on that ship and Aleksander knows all of them by name after the year spent hunting Saren together.

Fifty one people are on the Normandy when it goes down.

And Aleksander isn't one of them.

// Aleksander Morozova copes with the death of Commander Alina Starkov, until she shows up in the scope of his sniper rifle two years later.

## Notes

so this little one-shot was born mostly because of the timing, with shadow & bone's release just around the same time as the mass effect: legendary edition. since i am a hardcore shakarian shipper, i couldn't resist combining two of my favorite things. plus i wanted to see aleks as a vigilante sniper, sue me. i hope you enjoy this fic, it is the first one i'm posting for darklina but keep an eye on this account because it definitely won't be the last. i'm in the middle of a much longer fic that involves darklina and horses but thought this would be a fun break. if you enjoy, please feel free to drop me a like or comment, or come find me over on twitter [@slowklancing](#) where i share too many of those tiny aus for darklina because they're too damn cute.

p.s. please don't feel like you have to have played mass effect to read this! i included links in the endnote to anything mentioned in the fic that might be confusing, but come on, i know you're all just here for the angst.

addendum: any recognizable dialogue belongs to the mass effect game, i do not own the mass effect or shadow and bone characters, etc. etc. the title is a lyric from lord huron's song "lost in time and space."

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Commander Alina Starkov's ship goes down somewhere over Alchera, the hull ripped apart and the crew exposed to the cold, empty vacuum of space. There are fifty one people on that ship and Aleksander knows all of them by name after the year spent hunting Saren together. He knows that Genya drinks coffee to drive away the headaches left by her outdated biotic implants and that Wylan's arms are often covered in burn marks from when his Omni-tool overheats after one too many self-modifications. He knows how to sense when Inej is nearby, even when she has her tactical cloak activated, and that Kaz is the best damn pilot in the Alliance Fleet but he can't walk without the use of his cane in case his bones snap out from underneath him as a result of his severe case of Vrolik's Syndrome.

Fifty one people are on the Normandy when it goes down.

And Aleksander isn't one of them.

He isn't one of them because after Saren, after the attack on the Citadel, Aleksander had looked at the rubble around him and thought *I could help fix this*. He had traded in his place on the Normandy to go back to Citadel Security, back to the desk job and the gun and the badge that he had left behind when he decided to play Spectre with Commander Starkov. He had hoped to make his mother proud, given her own history with C-Sec. He had hoped to make Commander Starkov proud, too, in a way. Wanted to prove himself, rise through the ranks, maybe be made a Spectre himself. So that the next time they met it could be as equals.

But they won't get a next time.

Commander Alina Starkov's ship goes down somewhere over Alchera. The escape pods are full of survivors, full of people that Aleksander knows. Genya and David and Wylan and Jesper and Inez. And Kaz. Kaz, the pilot who won't abandon his ship. Kaz, who the commander seals in an escape pod shortly before the ship takes a second blast and she is jettisoned out into space.

Where she suffocates to death.

Slowly. Torturously.

Until the empty expanse of space that had always been her home claims her for itself.

They never find her body.

She was the star of the Alliance and they can't do something as simple as find her body.

Aleksander attends a funeral with an empty casket, shakes hands with members of the Alliance brass whose names he can't bring himself to remember, listens to the stories the crew tells over drinks at the bar afterwards.

Then, in the morning, he packs up his desk at C-Sec and turns in his badge once again.

There's no point in trying to become a Spectre anymore.

Commander Alina Starkov's ship goes down somewhere over Alchera. Officially she's pronounced missing-in-action but everyone knows that she's dead. Officer Aleksander Morozova dies with her, on the Citadel and not the Normandy because he had not been on the ship. If he had, Aleksander knows he would have gladly gone down with her, would have hauled her ass into an escape pod himself and when that inevitably failed because she would never leave a member of her crew behind, he would have joined her in her rescue of Kaz. He would have been there. Watching her six. Like he was meant to be. But he hadn't been. And now she's gone. He doesn't know how to live in a world where Commander Starkov doesn't exist. He doesn't want to learn. So he lets Officer Aleksander Morozova die. And in his place, The Darkling is born.

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Omega is a shithole. The Darkling chose Omega because it is a shithole, because it is a roiling mass of gangs and blood and violence where the weak are preyed upon and there are no laws to protect them. Where there are no laws. Period. It is easy to distribute vigilante justice on Omega. There is always another bad guy to track, another shipment to stop, another deal to close. The Darkling loses himself to a series of sniper shots, to biotic punches. Tries not to imagine what Commander Starkov would say if she met him now, like this. She's dead. The Darkling adds another tally to his kill count. And then he starts another job.

He doesn't expect the crew, is not prepared for the burden of leadership as others flock to his cause. They think he is cleaning up Omega. He isn't. Not intentionally. He's just a weapon searching for another target. It takes them a long time to work their way through the armor he constructs around himself. They never learn his true name, not from him, but The Darkling knows they have their own guesses concerning his identity.

They make a base and turn it into a home, they play cards and bet with dwindling credits or stim packs, they trade weapon mods and share meals. It reminds The Darkling of the Normandy. Of the life he had left behind before he came to Omega. A year passes and he can breathe again when he hears Commander Starkov's name on the vids.

He grows comfortable, relaxed. He lets his guard down.

It is a mistake.

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The crew are mostly dead when he returns, and the few that aren't will be within a couple of hours. Their wounds are too severe for the quick fix of Medi-gel and they are pinned down inside the base by armed mercenaries. Blue Suns. Eclipse. Blood Pack. The three largest gangs on Omega had united against The Darkling. They hate him that much. Want him dead that much.

He'd been betrayed by someone he had trusted, let himself be lured away. And now they are all dead. Ivan. Feydor. Even Luda.

The Darkling collects the bodies, covers them with sheets. He cannot bury them with the respect they deserve, it is the best he dares to offer while he is still under constant fire.

It is not enough. It is never enough.

Eleven bodies. The only one not dead is just waiting to be put in the ground, their forehead already painted with a mark for The Darkling's sniper rifle to find.

Revenge. It's as powerful a motivator as any.

He has nothing else to live for, anymore.

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He's low on stim packs. He had run out of food days before, had been without water for almost twenty-four hours. He'd keep fighting until the stim packs gave out or his heat sinks did, whichever came first.

The gangs throw another wave of mercenaries at him, and he picks them off easily, the bridge they are forced to cross to access his base leaving them open and exposed.

They go down easily. He replaces the heat sink in his sniper rifle.

He is running out of time.

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He's not sure what he's waiting for until he sees it. Until he sees *her*. But then it makes sense. Commander Starkov had pulled his ass out of the fire more times than she probably knew. Of course his subconscious knows that what he is hoping for, what some part of him thought would happen even though it went against all logic, is for her to appear one more time. Right when he needs her. Like she always has.

He blinks, sure that the N7 insignia on the mercenary's chest will resolve into a red symbol of the Blood Pack.

It doesn't.

He sweeps his scope up, lets himself linger on the face of a woman he knows is dead. A face that haunted him from every vid screen, in his memories, even his dreams.

It's funny. He never realized how much she meant to him until she died.

He had never gotten the chance to tell her that.

Pale skin. Dark hair, cropped shorter than he is used to, cut at her chin. Vicious scars line her cheeks, glowing faintly with an eerie red. Those are new, too. Soft eyes. Full lips. Eyebrows furrowed in a determination that he would know anywhere.

He swaps out his heat sink for a concussive shot before he lets his finger pull the trigger, sure that this - finally - will be enough to disrupt the hallucination.

The shot slams into her shields, blue rippling in the air around her. The ghost doesn't vanish.

*Maybe I'm dead*, The Darkling lets the words ring through his mind. *Maybe this is my afterlife.*

He thinks he would be okay with that.

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There's a hiss as the door seal opens behind him. Metal footfalls on the ground. The Darkling doesn't turn. Leaves his back exposed as he continues to eye the mercs on the bridge below his vantage point.

"Darkling?" A voice calls, firm and authoritative. It's *her* voice. It resonates through The Darkling's and settles in his bones.

He doesn't turn, not ready to shatter the illusion just yet. Holds up one hand in the universal symbol of 'one second' while he lines up one last shot. The last merc drops to the ground, forever silenced, and the Darkling turns, using his sniper rifle to propel himself to his feet. He's too tired, too hungry, too empty. He should be dead.

As he turns to face her, he reaches up to unlatch his helmet, removing it and setting it to the side, so that there is no barrier between them. The Darkling had taken his last shot, and it is Aleksander Morozova who greets her. Resurrected from the dead as much as she is. His eyes sweep over her pale skin and her dark hair and that familiar N7 insignia glistening on her armor. The knowledge that this is no trick sinks in at last. No hallucination. She is really here, standing in front of him, two years after she died. A living ghost. A Spectre.

His legs feel weak, and he doesn't trust himself to remain standing so he lowers himself onto a nearby crate in what he hopes looks casual and cool, not weak. "Starkov," he says, a name he hasn't said aloud in all that time. He lets his lips twist around the sound of it, the way they always have. As if no time has passed at all. "I thought you were dead."

"Aleksander!" Commander Starkov's face lights up in recognition and she steps forward with her arms wide, as if she is going to hug him before remembering herself, remembering the type of relationship they had. "What are you doing here?"

"Just keeping my skills sharp. A little target practice," it is easier to fall into their old banter than it should be, with the eleven corpses of his crew lying beneath sheets downstairs.

But the Commander has always been able to see through him. "You okay?"

"Been better. But it sure is good to see a friendly face."

There's other things to talk about. What brought him to Omega, why the gangs teamed up to take him down, when he had decided to leave C-Sec but Aleksander can barely focus on the answers he is giving her. He is too distracted taking in the changes to her appearance, those red scars glowing on her face.

"Since when did you start calling yourself The Darkling?" Commander Starkov asks, bringing Aleksander back to himself.

“It’s just a name the locals gave me,” he answers. “I think I make them uneasy. I don’t mind it, but please... it’s just Aleksander to you.” He pauses and then adds “Alina.”

The grin she gives him in response is worth the risk. Aleksander can’t remember ever calling her by her first name while they were aboard the Normandy. No one did.

“It’s good to see you,” Alina says, and Aleksander hears his own exhaustion mirrored in her voice. He can’t help but wonder what the last two years have been like for her.

But he doesn’t comment on it. Instead, they get to work.

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There’s a moment when Aleksander passes his sniper rifle to Alina, when he watches as she takes a shot and effortlessly puts down one of the LOKI mechs, security droids, that had been sent after them, that he remembers why he had been compelled to follow her into hell in the first place.

Why he had spent a year watching her six, serving as her second in command.

He had forgotten how it *felt* to be in her presence.

“Just like old times, Starkov,” he says, even though it isn’t, not really. But it’s close enough.

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He doesn’t remember the blast from the rocket launcher, although from the look on Alina’s face when he strolls through the automated doors leading to the briefing room he knows that it was bad. Knows that it was bad because the only thing keeping him on his feet is the Medigel the doc had pumped into him.

Still, he grins at her. “Starkov.”

One of her new crew members, Nikolai, is in the room with her. “Tough son of a bitch,” he whistles, sounding impressed. “Didn’t think you’d be up yet.”

“Nobody would give me a mirror,” Aleksander says, reaching up to brush a finger across the bandages on his face. “How bad is it?”

Alina cocks her hip. “Hell, Aleks,” she teases. “You were always ugly. I doubt anyone will even notice.”

A laugh bubbles in Aleksander’s stomach, but he stops when the movement makes him grimace in pain. “Oh, don’t make me laugh. Damn it. My face is barely holding together as it is.” He pauses before adding, “some women find facial scars attractive. Mind you, most of those women are Krogan.”

Alina shakes her head, but Aleksander can tell that she is amused.

He doesn't point out that now they are a matched pair, although he wonders if her thoughts run parallel to his in that way they always seem to.

Sensing his presence is no longer needed, Nikolai leaves the room, the automated door closing behind him.

Dropping his voice, growing more serious, Aleksander says "Frankly I'm more worried about you."

"That's why I'm glad you're here, Aleks," the Commander says, in a rare show of honesty. "If I'm walking into hell, I want someone I can trust at my side."

"You realize this plan has me walking into hell, too," Aleksander says. "Hm. Just like old times."

Alina grins at him. "I need you to watch my six, Morozova."

Just like old times indeed.

They can talk about the rest of it later. Aleksander's team. The two years Alina missed. How she's dealing with the fact that she literally came back from the dead. They'll talk about his impulse control and the downward spiral that led to his vigilante status and whether or not that changes the way she thinks about him. And maybe someday Aleksander will finally get the chance to tell her what she means to him, for him. But there's no need for that to be tonight.

Not when they can share a drink in the lounge instead and take comfort in the fact that they are, once more, on the Normandy together.

And maybe someday Aleksander will tell her the rest of it, too.

After all, they have all the time in the universe.

Or, well, they will.

After they save it.

Again.

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Commander Alina Starkov's ship goes down somewhere over Alchera. But like she always does, like she always will, she manages to find her way back to him.



## End Notes

alchera  
saren  
biotics  
omni-tools  
tactical cloak  
alliance navy  
vrolik's syndrome  
the ssv normandy  
the citadel  
citadel security (c-sec)  
spectre  
omega  
medi-gel  
blue suns  
eclipse  
blood pack  
stim pack  
heat sink  
n7  
concussive shot  
kinnetic barrier (shields)  
LOKI mech  
krogan

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